

Reflection for Wednesday 24 June

Collect for the birth of John the Baptist

Almighty God,
by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born,
and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Saviour by the preaching of repentance:
lead us to repent according to his preaching and, after his example,
constantly to speak the truth, boldly to rebuke vice,
and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the Third Sunday after Pentecost

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray,
and give more than either we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid,
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask,
save through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ,
your Son our Lord. Amen.

The Gospel: Luke 1:57-66, 80

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.' ⁶¹ They said to her, 'None of your relatives has this name.' ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. ⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Reflection

Today we celebrate the birth of Sandra, Maggie, Margot, Betty, ... and the birth of John the Baptist.

The arrival of a baby is exciting. People are always filled with anticipation, wondering who the baby will look like, whether it will be a girl or a boy, what size will it be, will the baby arrive on time, or early, or late, will the labour go smoothly etc.

Well the birth of John the Baptist certainly provoked a lot of comment not only about the usual things but also because his parents were elderly, past child-bearing age, and his father had been struck dumb throughout the entire pregnancy. What excitement and speculation there must have been as they waited for his arrival!

John the Baptist was truly a gift from God. God's angel had announced to his father, Zechariah, that he would be the prophet of the Most High, going before the Lord to prepare his way. What an enormous expectation for the life of a brand new baby; the fulfilment of not only the dreams and hopes of his parents, but also the dreams and hopes of the people of Israel who yearned for the Messiah.

I wonder what people said when each of you here today was born? What they hoped and expected for and of you. I remember looking at each of my children when they were born, seeing in their eyes their own unique identities and wondering who they would grow to be, hoping and praying that my own desires for them would not get in the way of them growing to be the people that God had made them to be.

Many people go through life weighed down by the hopes and desires of others. It is impossible to live up to other people's expectations, and that is as true for us as adults as it is for babies. Too many lives are embittered by the pressure of the expectations of others.

John the Baptist was a gift from God. So is each one of you. God has hopes and desires for each of us, but they are not the kind that embitter or overwhelm us. Instead, God's dream for each of us is that we grow up into ourselves, discovering day by day who God has made us to be, and what is possible through the power of God's love for us.

There is a story of the wise Rabbi Zusya who said, *In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'*

God only wants us to be our true selves. And God has given each of us the task of growing into who God made us to be, and of encouraging those around us to be who they were made to be, as we love, respect, enjoy and encourage each other.

Today's Gospel reading ended with the words, *the child – John – grew and became strong in spirit* (1:80a). It is God's Holy Spirit in our hearts that enables us to become strong in our own spirit, strong and clear in our God-given identity. Regardless of our skills and limitations, regardless of who or what others want us to be, it is the nurturing of the life of the spirit, given to us in our baptism, that enables us to grow each day into the gift God has made us to be.

May the Spirit of God make you grow strong. Amen.